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Oklahoma Policy Institute

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Oklahoma near the worst in the nation for child well-being

New KIDS COUNT Data Book ranks Oklahoma in the bottom ten states for education, child health, and family and community supports

TULSA, Oklahoma — A new report shows the youngest generation of Oklahomans faces far-reaching challenges. The state ranks near the bottom in the nation for most measures of child well-being, according to the *2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Overall, the report ranks Oklahoma 44th out of all 50 states for child well-being. While Oklahoma made significant gains in reducing teen births and reducing the number of children without health insurance in recent years, the state still ranks among the lowest in the nation on those measures.

“Even in those areas where Oklahoma has seen the most improvement recently, we still have a lot of work to do to set up our kids for success,” said Gene Perry, director of strategy and communications for Oklahoma Policy Institute. “We have a high rate of teen births, hundreds of thousands of kids living in poverty, tens of thousands without health insurance, and high numbers of children who aren’t getting what they need to become proficient in reading and math.”

The report also shows Oklahoma ranks sixth highest in the nation for the percentage of children living in “hard-to-count” U.S. Census tracts, putting almost 100,000 kids at risk of being undercounted. The 2020 Census will determine how much federal funding states and localities receive each year for the next decade. When kids aren’t counted, communities don’t get their fair share of federal dollars for Head Start, school lunches, and many other services that help young children get a healthy start in life.

“If we don’t count children, we render their needs invisible and their futures uncertain,” said Casey Foundation President and CEO Patrick McCarthy. “A major census undercount will result in overcrowded classrooms, shuttered Head Start programs, understaffed hospital emergency rooms, and more kids without health care.”

The annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains — health, education, economic well-being, and family and community — as an assessment of child well-being. Oklahoma ranks:

- **36th in economic well-being.** The economic security of Oklahoma kids has improved significantly in recent years, as the state and national economy emerged from recession. Compared to 2010, fewer families faced burdensome housing costs, fewer children lived in poverty, and more parents were employed full-time. However, the percentage of teens

(16-19) not attending school and not working continues to be one of the highest in the nation at 9 percent.

- **46th in education.** Oklahoma's ranking for education was lowest among all areas covered in the report. While Oklahoma had seen progress in improving fourth-grade reading proficiency, that progress was reversed in 2017 with 71 percent of fourth-graders scoring below proficient — ranking the state 44th in the nation. Oklahoma students ranked even lower (45th) for eighth-grade math proficiency, with 76 percent scoring below proficient compared to a national average of 67 percent.
- **44th in the family and community domain.** Teen birth rates are at an all-time low nationwide and in Oklahoma, where they have dropped 34 percent since 2010. Despite this improvement, Oklahoma's 2016 rate of 33 births per 1,000 females age 15 to 19 is tied with Mississippi for second-highest in the nation. Oklahoma also ranked among the highest for children in families where the head of household lacks a high school diploma (141,000 children, or 15 percent of all kids in the state).
- **40th in health.** Oklahoma was a national leader for one measure of child health in the *Data Book* — the state is tied for the lowest percentage of children ages 12-17 who abused alcohol in the past year (4 percent). Oklahoma also achieved a reduction in the percentage of low birthweight babies by 7 percent since 2010 and now ranks 19th in the U.S. on this measure. However, the state continues to struggle with a relatively high child uninsured rate (7 percent, fourth-highest in the U.S.) and a high rate of child and teen deaths (35 deaths per 1,000, sixth-highest in the U.S.).

“For too long, Oklahoma has under-invested in children and put too many barriers in the way of young families who are struggling to get by,” said Perry. “The commitments made this year to fund education and teacher pay will help, but we also took some steps in the wrong direction.”

“For example, the push by Governor Fallin and the state Legislature to deny health care to very low-income parents who don't meet strict work and reporting requirements threatens health-care access for both these parents and their children,” said Perry. “We must do better to become a state where all children have what they need to thrive.”

Release Information

The 2018 KIDS COUNT® *Data Book* will be available June 27 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at www.aecf.org/databook, which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of indicators of child well-being. Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings in stories about the *Data Book* can use the KIDS COUNT Data Center at datacenter.kidscount.org.

About Oklahoma Policy Institute

Oklahoma Policy Institute is an independent nonpartisan non-profit that provides factual information and advocates for fair and responsible public policies. For more information, visit okpolicy.org.

About the Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's children by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit www.aecf.org. KIDS COUNT is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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